

Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project
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David Yao
Lead Clerk, United States Postal Service
Vice President, American Postal Workers Union, Local 28
Member, Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance

Narrator: David Yao

Interviewers: Wendi Zhou

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WENDI ZHOU 00:00:25

This is Wendi Zhou interviewing David Yao, on Sunday, November 21, 2021 for the Working in the Time of COVID-19 Oral History Project. This is a remote interview. And David is in Seattle, Washington. So David, let's begin by providing a few details about yourself. So the first question is, can you please spell out your first and last name?

DAVID YAO 00:00:59

First name is spelled D-A-V-I-D, second name is spelled Y-A-O.

WENDI 00:01:04

Thank you. And how old are you?

DAVID 00:01:09

66.

WENDI 00:01:11

What is your birth date? And where were you born?

DAVID 00:01:15

March 19, 1955, Lincoln, Nebraska.

WENDI 00:01:20

What gender if any, do you identify as and what are your pronouns?

DAVID 00:01:25

Male, he/him.

WENDI 00:01:28

What race or ethnicity do you identify as?

DAVID 00:01:32

Multiracial: part Chinese, part mix: European, Caucasian.

WENDI 00:01:39

And how important is your racial/ethnic background to you?

DAVID 00:01:44

Somewhat.

WENDI 00:01:47

Can you talk about what social, political, ethnic, racial, or religious communities you regularly connect with or participate in?

DAVID 00:01:57

So: I'm a member of the Seattle Chapter of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance [APALA]. And also I'm active in my union, which does political activities. And that's sort of my main group affiliation.

WENDI 00:02:15

And where do you live now?

DAVID 00:02:18

In the north part of Seattle.

WENDI 00:02:20

Thank you. Now we'll move on to occupational information. So David, can you tell me what is your occupation or profession?

DAVID 00:02:31

I work at the Post Office [United States Postal Service], my job title is Lead Clerk. And I've done that for a long time.

WENDI 00:02:40

So how long have you been employed as a lead clerk? Or how long have you been employed in your industry?

DAVID 00:02:48

So I've worked for the Post Office since 1986. And I've been a lead clerk for the last three and a half years.

WENDI 00:02:58

And how long have you been a member of APALA?

DAVID 00:03:05

APALA, since probably around, somewhat right after it was formed around 1998 I would guess. I'm not exact on that. But it's been at least 20 years.

WENDI 00:03:22

And are you also a member of the American Postal Workers Union [APWU]?

DAVID 00:03:27

Yes, I've been a member of that since I started working in the Post Office in 1986.

WENDI 00:03:35

And have you served in any offices within the union? Do you remember?

DAVID 00:03:41

I have. Currently I'm the vice president of my union local and also steward. And in the past, I've been assistant craft director, and legislative director, as well as sergeant at arms for briefly.

WENDI 00:03:56

All right. Thank you. Now, can you run me through a typical day at work before the pandemic, from the time you woke up to the time you went to bed?

DAVID 00:04:06

Well, you should get up at breakfast, get ready for work. It's not too far away. My wife usually drops me off there at 00:10:15 in the morning, that's when I start. And I usually go in and assess the situation and move empty equipment around, set things up for the day. See what the staffing is at the window. And then usually I'll work on the window for a good chunk of the day as a retail clerk, sort of selling stamps to people helping them ship packages, answering questions, that sort of thing. But also as lead clerk, I'm sort of directing traffic as far as who goes to break next and who goes to lunch. And we have dispatchers as a mail three times a day. So we have to sort of get things labeled and organized and sorted out in various containers to put out on our loading dock. And for those three times today, we push out containers, four or five containers for the first couple of

dispatches, at the end of the day, all the mail gets pushed out in various store locations, including mail with the carriers and brought back. So that's an important part of the job, getting the mail out of the post office as well as accepting packages, and items that people have already printed, their postage for which they drop off at our counter. And it's generally a fair amount of that, especially recently. So at the end of the day, of doing those sorts of things, I'm elite clerks. So when we, when we close for the day, then everybody has to count their cash and checks and turn them in and I have to count them and assemble all that and put it in a special registered bag for depositing the bank. And then I have to go out into the lobby and sort of clean up the mess customers have made and stock the lobby for the next morning. And also do some sort of administrative work after, do timekeeping, and do some reports, and then set things up for the next day. And then if I'm the last person in the building, which happens sometimes I'll have to lock the lock things up and set the alarm, close a couple of gates, chain some doors, and then hit on home. And then when I get home, usually I--first thing I do is unpack my lunch and start making lunch the next day, and then maybe chill out reading the newspaper, shower, go to bed and then repeat.

WENDI 00:06:31

Thank you. And just to clarify were you designated a frontline or essential worker by the Washington governor's stay home stay healthy order?

DAVID 00:06:40

Yes, we were designated as essential workers.

WENDI 00:06:44

All right, how would you say your work has been impacted or disrupted by the COVID 19 pandemic?

DAVID 00:06:53

Well, especially because we were dealing with the public, it changed a lot of the dynamics of interacting with customers. So from early on the pandemic, everyone was required to wear masks, we started requiring customers to wear masks if they were coming in. And there were markers put in the floor so that people would social distance. So customers in the lobby were spaced in certain spaces. And then we were also putting our--opening our doors to the outside air to help with ventilation. So there are two sets of double doors leading into our lobby. So since early on the pandemic, we've had to pick both sets of doors open, regardless of the weather, whether it was really hot, or really cold. And our air conditioning or heating hasn't always worked, so it led to some very cold environments inside. But we sort of accepted that as the price of, you know, maintaining a healthy environment. At some point last year, in 2020, they put up plexiglass shields through spit guards between us and the customers that were hanging service protection. And then they also put in a plexiglass shield in between workstations later on. So that, you know, we're--we're not--we weren't--we weren't six feet or more apart from our co-workers until you know, and there was no protection until they put in those shields between us. And so they've also done away with I guess, congregating in the break room, so there's no big get together lunches. And we used to have a holiday tradition of having a big--actually, they would have to Thanksgiving meals every year, because people have different days off. So the people who missed it the first time, they would do like another Thanksgiving, and there were people who would throw some money into a pot and some dishes were bought, or people would bring in their dishes they made at home, and the same at

Christmas time. And those are both canceled last year and this year because of the pandemic. And because we're not encouraging people to share food, of course. So when we go into the break room, we're allowed to take our masks off when we're eating of course. But generally people sit apart, there's only three tables in the break room. So there might be three people in there. Recently, I've seen more people sitting at the same table. And also early on the pandemic people weren't quite as good at following the distancing precautions until, you know, everybody kind of got used to it. So those are some changes that were made. Yeah, I guess that's what comes to mind readily.

WENDI 00:09:44

So did you ever feel in danger or that your health was threatened on the job as a result of the pandemic?

DAVID 00:09:53

Well, we were certainly worried about it. And it's kind of hard to sort of assess exactly how much the threat is something that's invisible is and something that you haven't quite experienced firsthand. We've certainly got stories from customers who knew people who had gotten COVID, or who died of COVID. And I have a co-worker who believes he had COVID, early last year and wasn't diagnosed, and he says he still feel short of breath because of it. We did have several people who were diagnosed as positive and had to quarantine at various points. That's not an uncommon issue. It was definitely stressful. I don't know that I knew I was in danger, but I wasn't sure that I wasn't either. So it's kind of hard to, you know, everybody was kind of in this sort of big state of uncertainty, I think, in general as to what level of danger there was. And there are people who, of course, take more precautions, there are people who are--took fewer precautions or sort of didn't want to participate. And that was kind of annoying to see people who didn't want to wear masks, although people think pretty good these days about that. I think people have gotten used to it.

WENDI 00:11:14

All right. And you mentioned the setting up of plexiglass barriers earlier. So did you feel that your employer did enough to provide personal protective equipment?

DAVID 00:11:33

Well, the Postal Service has literally 10s of 1000s of facilities, and ours happened to be one that was relatively well stocked, because we have the Seattle safety person who works out of our office, and she also is a person who orders lots of supplies. So we generally were well stocked with pretty much what we needed, as far as early on, the emphasis was on masks on gloves and hand sanitizers. And of course, more recently, the mask and the respiratory aspect is has become more prominent because the science has developed. I don't know that we were cleaning as much as was required, it was promised early on, but now, sort of the surfaces as a vector for infection seems to be less of a concern because of what they've discovered through, you know, the scientific study. So I would say in general, our place was well equipped, but not every place that I heard of either conversationally or social media, other places did have shortages, for sure.

WENDI 00:12:41

Alright, and what actions did you, or your union or co-workers take to address issues in the workplace that resulted as an effect of COVID-19?

DAVID 00:12:58

Well, there was a lot of discussion of enforcement of various sorts of protocols. And so we were interacting with customers on that. Not all of them were very happy, we did get, we have had some negative customer reactions to request to wear masks. Generally, not generally, people are pretty, I think, pretty aware of what the obligations are to other people. But there are people who are--who were less than polite, not many of them I have to report. But there were people that made it, didn't cooperate readily. We've. So--so the retail clerks there kind of talked about it and work together to try and get people to follow the precautions that were required there. And we also tried to report to our managers if there were issues, such as trash not being collected, which was a problem for awhile, because we did not have a custodian. We were trying to get those issues resolved.

WENDI 00:14:12

Okay, thank you. And are there any other points you would like to raise with regard to your experience of health and safety during the pandemic?

DAVID 00:14:26

Yes, well I just wanted to mention that our union meetings went entirely to Zoom meetings, which has its pros and its cons. My union office is about an hour round trip away from where I work, and so that actually, in some ways was more convenient. And I think, in some ways, it helps people to participate more. On the other hand, there's limitations for Zoom and you can't talk to people informally. And sometimes the connections don't work very well. We had all kinds of technical issues with that. Early on in the pandemic, in late April of 2020, when people were still very freaked out about going anywhere, and what exactly say to be cautions they should be taking, surfaces were still considered to be a big deal, there was a workers Memorial Day, which occurred as it does every year, and there didn't seem to be anything planned for that. So I talked to some other folks, and we did a small Memorial Day, Memorial Day Rally, out of Seattle in front of the post office there and talk to the folks in the building. And the president's letter carriers came out and some city workers came out to support us. And so there were--we had a small rally with signs saying, you know, please provide more, more protective equipment for essential workers, people, you know, stop the deaths of essential workers from COVID-19, we did have a problem getting people to participate, because some of the folks I talked to, were just really freaked out, and they didn't, you know, they didn't want to go anywhere or be around anybody. And we did a socially distanced rally, it was outdoors, we stayed apart, we were wearing masks, you know, we had hand sanitizers, so to my mind, it was totally safe. But so early on, just maybe five or six weeks into the pandemic, a lot of people just didn't want anything to do with anything in public. And even thinking through, didn't want to share a car with anybody. So it was a small event, but we did get some press coverage, the Seattle Times had took a photo and put it on their website. And we had, you know, I think it was a good thing to do. And I was a little disappointed, there wasn't more official participation, but people were just erring on the side of caution at the time, I think.

WENDI 00:16:49

And related to that. Did you ever get sick or know anyone who did? And what are your thoughts or feelings about that?

DAVID 00:17:05

You're talking specifically about COVID, I assume?

WENDI 00:17:08

Either COVID or, you know, any other illness?

DAVID 00:17:16

Well, my mother in law who had cancer that was in remission, and then recurred came to live with us during the pandemic, actually, and she passed away sort of, in our house, during the pandemic. And so she was being cared for by my wife 24 hours a day for a couple of weeks. And she had been in nursing homes, in a couple of nursing homes in January and February of 2020, right before the pandemic hit nursing homes, and we weren't satisfied with the quality of care, especially with the amount of money they were charging. And so she came to live with us. So we did have a sick person with us, she was--she'd also broken a bone falling, so she was not mobile. So we would take her for walks and push her around the neighborhood in a wheelchair, which she enjoyed. But we did have that experience with illness in our household during the pandemic. Otherwise, I think we were, personally my family was pretty illness free just partly because you're not in contact with other people you can't catch other diseases. It was, you know, there, there wasn't

DAVID 00:18:25

illness on our part, we did hear from customers who had known people who were sick of COVID, or who had died of COVID.

WENDI 00:18:37

And related to that, were you ever quarantined?

DAVID 00:18:42

Nope.

WENDI 00:18:43

Okay. Did you access any government or community support due to the virus?

DAVID 00:18:55

Well, of course, everybody got stimulus checks. So that was kind of a welcome thing to occur. You know, it sort of made us feel more financially secure. One of the odd things we did during the early stage of the pandemic, we started with a little tradition of ordering takeout food during the day, you know, once once a weekend, and we heard that Chinese restaurants were impacted by anti-Asian sentiment, so we found a Chinese restaurant that served vegetarian food that my family liked and they became sort of a weekly tradition, and also Indian restaurant and a Middle Eastern restaurant that we patronize, sort of rotating off, sort of feeling like we were, we were helping them survive during a time when nobody was dining out. And prior to that, we really never went to restaurants. And during the pandemic, we started doing takeout every weekend for about a year, I think, until things started to recover.

WENDI 00:19:58

Okay, it's interesting you mentioned that because the pandemic has had a lot of impact on people's social lives. So, how has the pandemic changed your social life? And have you had any events that were formerly in person that went online or were socially distanced?

DAVID 00:20:24

Well, my family would go to music concerts fairly regularly, not real often, but a few times a year. And of course, those are all canceled. And even recently, concerts are coming up, and they're groups we're interested in, but sort of the last straw is well, the pandemic's not over, and we don't feel like being in a crowded space with a lot of people that we don't know. But union meetings, as I mentioned, our local union meetings went on by Zoom. Our national union conferences were either canceled or postponed, or most recently, conducted entirely online, which is, has its pros and cons. You know, it's done online and you're at home, it's, it's very distracting to not, you know, when you're, when you're off in a different city, and you're focused on one thing, then you're focused on one thing, and when you're at home, and you're trying to do something online, it's just easy, really easy, to get distracted. And, and, and to not focus entirely on that whole purpose. So, union conferences, also, our Central Labor Council used to have meetings in person, and they were kind of hard for me to attend because of my work schedule, but I actually was starting to attend, attending a few more then because I can do it by Zoom. Even though it's in the evening, I can catch part of meetings on Zoom. Zoom, actually, in some ways helped make those meetings more accessible. So I wouldn't say we had a lot of social things that we did. We have a group of longtime friends, who we always have Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner with, and that was, of course, canceled last year. And this year, our Thanksgiving is going to be at home, and we're going to meet with these folks online via Zoom once again, because there's some of the folks who are elderly, or, or have some sort of health issues. So, it's still having an impact on our social life and our personal activity.

WENDI 00:22:30

And going off of that, can you walk me through a typical day in your life during the pandemic, from the time you wake up to the time you go to sleep?

DAVID 00:22:40

Well, if you don't think it would be too boring. (laughs) Let's see my data. If I have breakfast, I brush my teeth, I assemble my lunch, I get the newspaper, let the dog out, let the dog in. This may be too much detail. But you know, get dressed, get dropped, dropped off at work. And at work, usually I put my stuff in the lunchroom and my lunch in the fridge in the lunchroom, drop off my coat in the locker, change in my uniform, clock in the time clock, check the back dock for empty equipment, start moving empty equipment around, talk to coworkers look at the schedule, I might have to make adjustments to the schedule because I do that. And then at some point, I will be working on the window, when needed, depending on how many customers we have and how many clerks we have that day. And so my schedule starts at 00:10:15. I have a break probably a couple hours into the workday, in which I actually eat my lunch, because I want to eat my lunch in the middle of the day, and 15 minutes is not a long time to eat one's lunch. And then other folks are going to lunch and we dispatch mail a couple times. And then I have my lunch where sometimes I'll come home for lunch, my wife will pick me up and she has the car and then I'll drive back with the car. Or at lunch while I'm there, I might read the newspaper, or listen to something, or watch something on my phone, or just walk around playing Pokemon Go. And then

when lunch is over, then it's usually not too far from the end of the day, the rest of us take our breaks, and we close at six o'clock. And then during the day, people bring in a lot of items that they've--that they prepared for mailing at home, they pre-printed the labels, and there was a really big increase in this because of the pandemic. So our work did change because people were not shopping in stores nearly as much, in some cases not at all, especially early on, and so all these mail order businesses sprung up. And conversely people who were not able to go to work because of the pandemic, they started their own little entrepreneurial forays into selling items that they had, you know, either stuff from their attic, or things they made themselves or things they bought cheaply and resold. And so we've seen this big rise in the last in well, this year, and last year, in the number of people bringing in packages that they're mailing, so this sort of changed the nature of our work. It also changed our work in that the Postal Service delivers lots of parcels, and we deliver for UPS, or FedEx, or Amazon, as a matter of fact. All those places give us their overflow and we deliver for them, because it apparently costs them less to subcontract it to us than to have their own people do it, because our mail carriers go to every door every day. Anyway, right, so we had this huge increase in volume, and it was actually more than we could handle. Last year, we were kind of, even before the giant mailing rush around the holidays, we were kind of strained to capacity, that we were people working long hours, and it was hard to get all the work done. Even managers started working the mail, which they're not supposed to do, but we would have to file a grievance on that and get compensation. But during the whole month of December, our station in particular, got hit really hard by Amazon because Amazon doesn't have a delivery network setup as well in our part of Seattle. So people were working lots of hours, in December, they were working 12, 14 hour days. And even now where I work, we're having a shortage of workers because people are retiring and it's hard to get, find people to replace them. And so some of the mail carriers are working 12 hours a day. And I can say I do timekeeping, I stated some of them are working even like 15, close to 16 hours a day, not every day, but--but not infrequently. So there's just more work than there are people. And that's been, that's been an on/off problem where we are and other post offices as well. And there's not enough people applying for the jobs that they have open. But also the entry level wage can become less competitive because wages have risen a lot during the pandemic. Starting with the \$15 an hour minimum wage movement, which started partly in Seattle a few years ago, that has helped raise wages around the country. And that's gained momentum, especially during the pandemic.

DAVID 00:27:42

And so, sometimes, especially last year, when we were shooting I would stay late and sort parcels for the next day, which is not really part of my regular job, but there is just so much work to do that everybody had to, kind of, do a little bit of extra for us to keep our heads above water. And things that eased off somewhat this year, but as I said, as far as the carriers go, they are, they're coming back very late, some of them start at six in the morning, and I'll see them at 10 o'clock at night, if I'm staying that late to work. So the last year and a half I've been working, I'd say probably an average of over nine hours a day, and then working some of my days off, even though I'm not--I didn't sign up to work overtime, but if there's overtime, sometimes they have to give it to people who didn't sign up for it. And also because of the nature of my job, you know, I do administrative work at the end of the day. And then often, you know, during the workweek, my work hours are such with a one hour lunch that I'm, kind of, getting home, so there's never really much time to do anything, making my lunch, getting ready for bed, getting stuff ready for the next day, and getting up in the morning, heading off to work again. So that's a not uncommon experience for people who are working long hours.

WENDI 00:29:07

So related to that, how has the pandemic impacted your sense of personal well-being and this can involve, you know, the changes you just described in your work schedule, but overall, what would--what effects would you say the pandemic has had on your sense of personal well-being?

DAVID 00:29:30

Well, of course, if it's led to a sense of uncertainty. You know, I--I think have a certain self-confidence in my own health, which may be sort of irrational, but early on, it was it was very--it was it was fairly stressful, just one more thing, especially when we were working worried about surfaces and washing your hands and what surface you touch and wearing gloves. And that was a very, especially if you already have OCD tendencies, then that can be like, add this whole layer of issues to your workday. But we sort of moved away from that now, fortunately. I would say, a little bit worried because we couldn't get like dental, or medical appointments. But those were put off, and I just recently had my first checkup. And the--I guess my old doctor retired because the pandemic. So I had to go into new, new medical system, got a new doctor, and I went at least two years between checkups, it was possibly longer than that. Same with dental. It was a good two years between my visit, and I was a little worried about that. Fortunately, I had no cavities, which I was shocked by. But that was--that really kind of didn't help. You know, I was, I guess, fortunate that I never--that nobody in our household contracted COVID, because that would have been really, you know, much more personally threatening. I don't think that I, in my sense of personal well-being, suffered more than the average during the pandemic, I would say.

WENDI 00:31:32

Okay, that's good to hear. And have any family, friends, neighbors, or strangers helped you in any way as a result of the pandemic?

DAVID 00:31:52

Well, that's a good question. You know, I would say actually, the--where I felt the most support was at work, that a lot of customers were very, very grateful and appreciative and expressed that when they came in, especially during 2020, they were just thank you for being here. You know, that was very positive to hear. And since it seemed like I had been spending most of my time at work, that was where the most positive support really came from.

WENDI 00:32:31

And would you mind describing a little bit more about social distancing, or the wearing of masks or other strategies, other public health strategies, that you, your family, social circle, or your co workers practiced during the pandemic?

DAVID 00:32:53

Well, it was kind of a subject of discussion, if we would go out and go, go to a store, when especially when--Well, I guess I would go to the store in the evening, at a grocery store nearby, where there's hardly anybody there, but there were--there have been lots of restrictions, we would try and do social distancing. And just, you know, stay away, stay away from people or stay away from close contact. At work, you can't always stay six feet from everybody. So you know, if you're wearing masks, and we're close, we sort of had to do that to

talk to people. It's kind of hard to work people--with people in space, and staying six feet apart. But yeah, we've always carried masks around or asked people to wear masks if they didn't have a mask, or just try to keep their distance. I think, also being aware that the outdoors are somewhat safer. So we were a little less, what's an issue there. But certainly, it makes going to any building where there are other people something where you had to give it some thought and preparation for going to a store or anything like that. We would just try and, you know, stay away from being in proximity with somebody for more than a few seconds, if we could possibly help it. So the way you interact in a social space really was changed by the pandemic, right, I think the mindful of where we are and where other people are.

WENDI 00:34:30

All right. Thank you for telling me so much about how the pandemic has impacted your life, and your life at work, and your social life. So are there any other, you know, interesting points you would want to make regarding you know how your life has changed because of the pandemic? Before we move on to questions about race and racism.

DAVID 00:35:11

Yeah, I guess, I guess we've been sort of constantly monitoring the news and newspaper and the pandemic was talked in news every single day. And just, it's been a subject we've talked about a lot, and, and a whole issue that's evolved over time and is still with us. And it's been front of mind for us, and probably for a lot of people for quite a long time; it seems to be easing up somewhat as--in terms of being the only new story now. But last year, it was like the number one thing. So, you know, definitely, we'll look back at this period as being a very sort of different period, in our lives and the terms--in a way, in terms of the way we lived in really our mental state was just very much altered by you know, how we interact with people and, and the sorts of possibilities of ways of interacting with was just profoundly affected and changed.

WENDI 00:36:15

Thank you. And the next few questions, we'll discuss the notion of the issues of race and racism during the pandemic. So earlier on, you mentioned getting takeout at Chinese restaurants impacted by the situation of anti-Asian hate. So would you mind telling me a bit more your or other people's experience of anti Asian hate during the pandemic?

DAVID 00:36:41

We certainly talked with the news and I was trying to assess, you know, how, how often does this sort of thing happen? It just seemed like it was very isolated incidents where somebody would specifically target someone who was alone and seemed vulnerable. But, you know, this, this whole thing where, I guess--I did have one incident at work, where one of my co workers who's from the Philippines, was asked by a white male, at some point in their conversation, I don't know, if they had a disagreement, they were saying, "Where are you from? Where are you from?" And so she just said, I'm from Wuhan, sir, I just came back, because she was mad at him. And I thought that was kind of a funny response. So there was that, and I, and I think there was another incident that I can't recall quite clearly. But yeah, it was definitely, definitely something concerning. And we read about that in, you know, in Seattle, of course, Seattle is a very multiracial city, and there are a lot of Asians here. And being Asian in Seattle doesn't seem to be--doesn't, it doesn't seem to be the place, a place where you'd have to

be self-conscious about your race where, whereas I felt differently in other cities where I've lived or visited. So I would have hoped that it would not had been a problem here, but it was just maybe thinking about, you're traveling to a place, you know, outside of this city, especially, you know, further away, all white areas, is it going to be a problem? You know, and it certainly raises some, some, some doubt and some concern.

WENDI 00:38:42

And related to the topic of racism, a wave of protests for the Black Lives Matter movement first emerged during the spring of 2020. And what are your observations and thoughts regarding this movement or the issues of racial and police violence that it raises?

DAVID 00:39:06

Well, I think the fact that cell phone cameras exist has helped to expose a lot of racial disparities in, especially in police behavior that weren't commonly accepted as being problems before. And that was something that has been happening gradually over the last, over the last few years, that really culminated last year, and there were mass protests. My daughter and I did go to one of the earlier ones in downtown Seattle around, I think it was in late May. And that was actually the one which there were some, some black-clad groups of people who burned a police--turned over and burned a police car, I think--they burned a police car. And we were actually at the rally that was trying to stay peaceful, it was just adjacent to that, so we were sort of witness to that. And then a few weeks later, there was a large march and rally from a park in South Seattle, that my daughter and I attended. And so this was, these were sort of the first occasions where people were coming out in large numbers during a pandemic. And of course, there was the question of how safe you are, but being outdoors and wearing a mask, you know, I felt, I felt reasonably confident. And there were, I would say many 1000s of people at the at the second March that I attended, it was a rally and a march, and it was, it was a silent march. And there were no police around, which was, I think, part of the de-escalation strategy, and so that may have been part of why there was, there wasn't, there were no confrontations there. So, so we did participate in Black Lives Matter marches, and, and have some--those are the two main things, like, that I can think of off the top of my head.

WENDI 00:41:17

And was your union involved or impacted by, you know, both the Black Lives Matter protests and the issue of anti-Asian hate or anything else having to do with issues of racism or racial violence?

DAVID 00:41:39

Well, I think our union has passed resolutions in support of Black Lives Matter in the past. You know, the fact that we were--that our meetings were somewhat restricted, and our activities were somewhat restricted by the pandemic did affect the degree to which we could talk about these things or engage in activism. Some of our union meetings we haven't gotten quorums, so we can't pass resolutions, when that occurs. And that's because of the pandemic and also, sort of, that plus people having to work lots of hours made it harder for the union to get together. But I think my union has been very conscious about racial issues, we do have a very large Black and a very large Asian contingent among our membership.

WENDI 00:42:34

And I'd like to move on to philosophical and reflective questions. So the first thing is, how do you think life will be different after the pandemic based on what you or others may have experienced?

DAVID 00:42:55

Well, the number one thing is not pandemic related, but climate related. We're certainly seeing much worse and more frequent disruptions due to climate change, and so that's obviously a serious concern. The pandemic did raise lots of issues about inequality, inequality of treatment and equality of income, which affected and impacted a lot of ways in which the government responded and in which, to which different political groups responded to the way the government responded. And we're still seeing that a lot of workers are more moved to activism because of either the precarious nature of their work currently, or what they perceive as the precarious nature previously, or maybe more time to see that there's a sort of better alternative available and that society is somewhat in flux, and so they're more willing to take chances, or go on strike or try, and form a union, or just not go to a job, or quit a job that they're not happy with. And so it seems like there's been a--somewhat of a shift in consciousness among workers about what the possibilities are, and it's hard to say how long that will last. And the pandemic also has sort of become a front in the culture wars between sort of people who believe in science and people who don't just to over-simplify, which isn't exactly describing those groups, but that's one way of looking at it. Well, hopefully after the pandemic people are still more conscious of the issues of inequality, homelessness has become a huge issue here in Seattle, and there's--it's both the inequality aspect and the rising house prices because of all the tech workers being imported by big, big corporations, but also the pandemic made it more difficult to find shelter or to, or to interact with people who are homeless, and so it's caused--caused a lot of concern. My thought about the homeless issue is it's really an issue of the housing industry that constructs housing not based on human needs but based on the ability to make profits and to charge as much money as possible. So the whole issue of making housing affordable or, put differently, making affordable housing, which currently is not happening at a sufficient rate, to me, that's a huge issue after the pandemic, that that needs to be addressed, as well as climate change, as well as inequality of income, as well as political power. There's lots of, lots of stuff there.

WENDI 00:45:58

Yeah, the pandemic has really raised these really important issues to think about. And the next question is what has surprised you about this period of time?

DAVID 00:46:21

Well, I don't know if it should be a surprise, but the degree to which climate change has become a factor is one thing I've really noticed. In June of this year, I went down to California to help my sister, she lives in an area that's been hit by a drought and has had huge fires last year. And so I started watching the California drought map. And I went down and actually spent a week helping her to trim brush and cut down trees around her property there because she lives out in the woods and it's definitely in a, you know, in a dry, dry area; you can see how dry all the trees were. And that was--I sort of sort of felt that impact more viscerally by seeing, you know, sort of the evidence there, and then watching the California drought map online, shrink or expand from little red spots to like almost the entire state since there was no rain for so many, many, many weeks. And then having, you know, having those issues, the smoke that was here last summer as well. Those were things that I don't know if I should have been surprised, but they definitely, those were things that made an impact.

WENDI 00:47:46

Yeah, definitely. Can you reflect on any positive experiences in the pandemic?

DAVID 00:48:00

Well, I think a lot of what I saw was people trying to be supportive or helpful, especially, like, customers, trying to be very courteous or understanding. And, obviously, that wouldn't always be universal, but, you know, I think that it did sort of underline the degree, the degree to which we're all sort of connected, and as a society, and that our society kind of has--has to function and work based on people working together and trying to get positive things done. And that negative problems won't go away, they have to be addressed. So I think there's that positive, the negative part is the--the number of people who have very either racist attitudes, or anti scientific attitudes, and often there's overlap there. That was kind of the--those ugly things have emerged in our society in the last few years, and you can see they're sort of mirror images in some of the, sort of, dictatorial regimes and other countries that try and use nationalism or racism to divide people, and are very anti-science that it's kind of discouraging to see, to see those things happen in our society as well as overseas and not the, you know, humanity is heading sort of forward progress slowly, incrementally. That's sort of the vision a lot of people have had. And now it's less clear whether that vision actually can take place.

WENDI 00:49:42

Yeah, thank you for sharing. And before we end this interview, are there any thoughts you'd like to share? And is there anything I've missed that you believe is important to talk about?

DAVID 00:50:00

Well, I think I think I've said what I need to say without going into too much deep philosophical detail that might be off-topic.

WENDI 00:50:09

Alright, thank you so much for taking the time to share your story with us, I really appreciate it. Thank you.

DAVID 00:50:18

Thank you.